

Virginia Board of Education
Student Advisory Committee
Minutes: April 26, 2007

Students in Attendance:

Katlyn Allen, James River High School; Adam Baker, Tabb High School; Brian Bills, Charlottesville High School; Rachel Chitwood, Pulaski County High School; Emma Horton, West Point High School; Jeremy Jones, Bailey Bridge Middle School; Paula Lewis, Lynnhaven Middle School; Justin Scott, Franklin County High School; Shelton Seaborn, Jr., Greensville County High School; Anna Skubel, George Washington Middle School; Monique Sturdivant, T.C. Williams High School; and KenzieVanDerwerker, Bedford Middle School.

Department of Education Staff in Attendance:

Michelle Vucci, Michelle Parker, Melissa Velazquez

Ms. Velazquez and Mrs. Parker welcomed the members of the Student Advisory Committee and reviewed the day's activities.

The Student Advisory Committee convened in their three work groups to discuss the research they had done since the last meeting and to develop their reports and recommendations for presentation to the Board of Education at its meeting on Friday, April 27, 2007.

The members of Work Group One developed their position and recommendations regarding foreign language and cultural awareness. The members of Work Group Two developed their position and recommendations regarding improvement of drug awareness and prevention. The members of Work Group Three developed their position and recommendations regarding closing the achievement gap.

The entire Student Advisory Committee then convened to hear the presentations from the three work groups and to make any suggestions for changes to the final reports. The reports for presentation to the Board of Education at its April 27, 2007 meeting are attached. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Statement from the 2006-2007 Student Advisory Committee of the Virginia Board of Education

Issue of Discussion:

Incorporating a more comprehensive study of foreign language as well as international education throughout a child's instruction.

Background:

Studies have shown that education in foreign language and culture is beneficial to a student's development in various aspects. Learning language supports life achievements. Among these achievements are:

- Intellectual growth and mental development;
- Higher scores on standardized tests of both verbal and nonverbal orientation;
- Development of high-order thinking, analytical skills, problem-solving skills, communication skills, and listening skills;
- Extension of competency in a student's native language especially in regards to vocabulary and grammar;
- Ability to work in teams and a heightened level of creativity;
- Greater marketability and competitiveness in the domestic and international workplace;
- Development of intercultural competence and cultural awareness;
- Creation of global connectivity and a curiosity about other countries;
- Breakdown of cultural boundaries.

Overall, a comprehensive knowledge of culture and foreign language offers students of the 21st century a wide array of opportunities academically, socially, and economically.

Position of the Student Advisory Committee:

The Student Advisory Committee requests that the Board address the urgency to reform the existing foreign language, cultural, and business curriculum model. It is pivotal that this more optimal education system provide students with more opportunities to acquire the skills necessary to compete and ultimately succeed in their future career endeavors. There is a sense of urgency to raise a generation of students who have a better understanding of international culture, business, and a host of other genres from a global perspective. In order to meet the increasing demand for more bilingual and culturally aware employees on a domestic and international scale, it is vital to implement a more in-depth curriculum in regards to these subjects. After months of research and discussion, we decisively conclude that the 1.2 million students of Virginia would benefit from

additional opportunities for global education as a way of maintaining the United States' international presence and competitiveness.

Recommendations:

To better prepare students for the international world of the future, we request that the Board consider the subsequent recommendations and curricular model that we believe will help the Virginia Board of Education to enhance the skills necessary for students to succeed.

Kindergarten – First Grade

This would include a six week exploration in each of four languages to include cultural education such as basic language, music, art, and literature.

Second Grade – Fifth Grade

These four years would be a comprehensive study of a first foreign language to end with a culminating experience in celebration of the culture.

Sixth Grade – Ninth Grade

These four years would be a comprehensive study of a second foreign language to end with a culminating experience in celebration of the culture.

Tenth Grade

During this year, International Relations/ Foreign Policy would be incorporated into the existing curriculum to learn more of America's interaction with other countries.

Eleventh Grade

During this year, Global Economy would be incorporated into the existing curriculum to learn more of the world's global market.

Twelfth Grade

During this year, the student may finalize his or her foreign language and international education with an internship at a company of the student's intended field of study or a class in the student's intended field of study.

In the future, students could graduate with these requirements and possibly receive a "Foreign Language/ International Studies Seal" and scholarships that would be advantageous in higher education and future careers.

Submitted by:

Katlyn Allen

Adam Baker
Brian Bills
Rachel Chitwood
Emma Horton
Jeremy Jones
Paula Lewis
Justin Scott
Shelton Seaborn, Jr.
Anna Skubel
Monique Sturdivant
Kenzie VanDerwerker

**Statement from the 2006-2007 Student Advisory Committee
of the
Virginia Board of Education**

Issue of Discussion:

Implementing and/or building upon drug abuse and alcohol awareness/prevention programs in Virginia middle schools.

Background:

The use of drugs and alcohol during the teen years has become an increasingly serious problem in school systems throughout the country. Statistics show that the earlier a person has his or her first experimentation with an illegal substance, the more likely he or she is to become a victim of substance abuse. A 2002 survey conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse revealed that by the eighth grade nearly half of students surveyed had tried alcohol at least once, thirty percent had used cigarettes, and twenty percent had tried marijuana. In light of these findings, a focus on prevention in the middle school years seems to be essential. Research has indicated that programs that teach middle school students to resist the pressures to use drugs and alcohol and provide information on the health and social consequences are the most successful.

Position of the Student Advisory Committee:

The Student Advisory Committee feels that this particular issue of drug and alcohol use is one of the most vitally important problems facing Virginia middle school students today. As all members of the committee are currently enrolled in Virginia public schools, we can see first-hand the growing predicament in grades six through eight. Most drug prevention programs, such as D.A.R.E., end in 5th or 6th grade. The average age of first use for alcohol and tobacco is approximately 12, while the average age for first marijuana use is about 14. Therefore, the committee believes that this age group of pre-teens is in most need of targeted prevention programs. Studies by the RAND Corporation show that early smokers and drinkers have substantially elevated risks for increased drug use and a variety of other high risk behaviors such as violence, unsafe sex, and dropping out of school.

The objectives that the committee wishes to obtain include a reduction in the number of middle school students who report having used illegal substances and a delay in the average age of first use of an illegal substance. These can be met by working in conjunction with the preexisting Health Education Standards of Learning for grades six, seven, and eight. Specifically, the following Health SOLs relate directly to the programs the committee wishes to implement:

- Health Standard (HS) 6.1, The student will apply critical thinking skills and personal management strategies to address issues and concerns related to personal health and well-being. Key concepts/skills include...
 - d) refusal strategies related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

- HS 6.2, The student will use knowledge of the body's structure and function to make sound decisions related to personal health. Key concepts/skills include...
 - d) the relationship of drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants to body functioning.
- HS 6.3, The student will describe the connections between mental and physical development as they relate to adolescence. Key concepts/skills include...
 - d) the effects of peer pressure.
- HS 7.2, The student will describe and exhibit the behaviors associated with a physically active and healthy lifestyle. Key concepts/skills include...
 - e) strategies for avoiding drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants.
- HS 8.1, The student will analyze and evaluate the relationship between health-risk behaviors and the onset of health problems that can impact health and well-being during the adolescent years. Key concepts/skills include...
 - c) the short- and long-term health issues related to alcohol abuse and tobacco use.
- HS 8.5, The student will investigate and evaluate ways in which peers, families, and other community groups can work together to build a safe and healthy community. Key concepts/skills include...
 - b) the health risks associated with yielding to peer pressure.

The goal of any alcohol and drug prevention program for youth should be realistic. The main goal of the program should be reducing harms associated with alcohol and other drug use, as opposed to preventing use completely.

Recommendations:

The committee desires that the Board of Education encourage or implement a drug awareness/prevention program similar to the one subsequently outlined.

The Social Influence Model is based on the premise that youth who use substances do so because of social pressures from peers, the family, and the media, as well as internal pressures (e.g., the desire to be “cool” and popular). It would provide information on health and social consequences and attempt to motivate students to resist the pressure to use.

Structure

- Programs should be especially intensive just prior to the average age of first use.
- Different approaches should be used for various subgroups (e.g., those with different levels of drug knowledge, background of use, or demographic characteristics).
- Programs should actively involve students in planning the curriculum and the implementation of said curriculum.

Content

- Programs should discuss the reasons people use drugs (e.g., self-discovery, self-expression, or a perceived benefit) and present alternatives to substance use.
- Programs should present both the dangers and the benefits of using and not using drugs, and focus discussions on short-term effects.
- It is important to discuss and correct perceptions regarding occasional or social use.
- Life-skills development (e.g., assertiveness, decision-making, and communication techniques) would be beneficial in resisting peer influence.

Delivery

- A tolerant atmosphere is important, free of scare tactics and moralizing. There should be an open dialogue between the program leaders and students.
- Program leaders should be trusted adults, who will present the facts accurately and in an unbiased manner.
- Peer leaders, chosen carefully to not alienate any particular social group already existing among the students, should assist the program leaders.
- Programs should emphasize active learning about drug effects rather than relying on passive lectures and films; interactive delivery methods, such as small-group discussions and role playing, are best.

School Policy

- A uniform policy on substance use and possession on school property is an important component of an inclusive prevention strategy for youth.
- A comprehensive policy, consisting of the following, should be put into effect:
 - A preventative curriculum
 - Early intervention
 - Disciplinary action
- The “Zero Tolerance” policy has proven to be ineffective in curbing or preventing substance use.
 - Imposing sanctions such as this may further alienate those students already at-risk.
 - “Zero Tolerance” policies may serve to discourage those who are experimenting or are at-risk for drug-related problems from seeking help.

Submitted by:

Katlyn Allen
Adam Baker
Brian Bills
Rachel Chitwood
Emma Horton
Jeremy Jones

Paula Lewis
Justin Scott
Shelton Seaborn, Jr.
Anna Skubel
Monique Sturdivant
Kenzie VanDerwerker

**Statement from the 2006-2007 Student Advisory Committee
of the
Virginia Board of Education**

Issue of Discussion:

Closing the achievement gap by continuing the successes of preschool education into the elementary school years and beyond

Background:

Children who are identified as at-risk are targeted by a variety of programs for early intervention including Head Start and the Virginia Preschool Initiative. In recent years, these programs have been expanded to cover more and more children. Governor Kaine has made this an educational priority through the Start Strong Program, which aims for universal coverage. According to the Hoover Institution, a public policy research center at Stanford, "Head Start produces an initial boost in children's test scores. However, most studies also show that these effects fade within a year or two after children enter school." We believe that some of the skills that these children learn during the school year are often allowed to atrophy over the summer. Nevertheless, there are examples of preschool initiatives that have long-lasting positive effects such as the Perry Preschool program in Michigan and the Abecedarian program in North Carolina. Particularly among children targeted by many of these programs, home life may be complicated or less than ideal, which can add to their educational struggles.

Position and Rationale of the Student Advisory Committee:

The achievement gap has been a significant issue and one which the Virginia Board of Education has made a priority. It is the position of the Student Advisory Committee that the Board should encourage the creation of summer programs for children participating in preschool initiatives. Early intervention for these students is the key to success in closing the achievement gap, because it is in the elementary years that basic skills in pre-reading, reading and mathematics are taught. Students who struggle with these foundational skills are put at a disadvantage for all of their future academic studies. A summer program would prevent children from losing the skills they have gained over the preceding school year. Early intervention programs may also pay for themselves by reducing the need for expensive remedial education and grade retention. Also, since student achievement is often affected by home life, which is beyond the school systems' direct control, these programs, by providing children with more opportunities to be in a safe school setting, could mitigate the deleterious effects of a troubled home life. We recognize that at-risk youth need special attention to basic skills and thus this program can provide these students with enjoyable school experiences which can improve their outlook on education. Since this program would be both voluntary and enjoyable, participating children may have a more positive attitude than may be found in a typical classroom.

Recommendations:

Because the Board of Education is a highly-respected source of information for General Assembly members, it has the opportunity to encourage and promote programs it views as successful. Therefore, we urge the board to explore, discuss, and promote the creation and funding of a program for children who have participated in preschool initiatives, particularly targeted at at-risk demographics. This program would run five days a week during the summer months. Characteristics would include:

- Nontraditional classroom setting, possibly including, but not limited to:
 - High-tech learning methods such as *podcasts*, distance learning, and *Smartboards*;
 - A broad curriculum encompassing music, art, outdoor activities, and other opportunities for enrichment;
 - Less passive learning and more student-driven or interactive exercises.
- Involvement of community members and high school students, rather than only teachers
- Parental involvement especially during special student-parent activities and when parents come to pick up and drop off their children
- Consideration of the curriculum the children have already been exposed to and will be learning in the coming school year
- Reinforcement of practical and everyday skills such as hygiene, manners, chores, and basic safety procedures
- Incorporation of values including, but not limited to, tolerance for peers and respect for teachers

Submitted by:

Katlyn Allen
Adam Baker
Brian Bills
Rachel Chitwood
Emma Horton
Jeremy Jones
Paula Lewis
Justin Scott
Shelton Seaborn, Jr.
Anna Skubel
Monique Sturdivant
Kenzie VanDerwerker